

# Pandemic INFLUENZA

## Planning and Preparedness Packet

New York State Department of Health



# Important Information From New York State's Health Commissioner

February 15, 2006

## Dear New York State Employer:

As you may be aware, the global health community is closely monitoring the occurrence of the H5N1 avian influenza virus prevalent throughout Asia, parts of Europe and now Africa. Although it primarily affects birds, there is significant concern that the virus could change to a type that spreads more easily from person to person, producing a worldwide influenza epidemic (referred to as a "pandemic").

Pandemics happen when a new influenza virus emerges to which people have little or no immunity. Although no one knows for sure when the next pandemic will occur, or what new influenza virus will cause a pandemic, the impact on society could be enormous.

An influenza pandemic could circle the globe rapidly and over the course of 2-3 months cause millions to become ill, seriously straining healthcare systems and affecting the ability of government and the private sector to provide essential services. In a severe pandemic, businesses will experience a dramatic reduction in their workforce as one-in-four employees becomes ill and other workers remain home to care for sick family members, or are absent due to child care issues if schools are directed to close.

The New York State' Department of Health Pandemic Influenza Plan underscores the potential magnitude of a pandemic on New York State, including its effect on the private sector. Every local health department in the state will be developing their own local plan to implement the strategies outlined in the state plan. You should reach "out to your local public health agency for advice and help in getting yourself and your business prepared. It is especially crucial that employers understand the gravity of a potential pandemic and begin now to prepare themselves.

The State Health Department is pleased to provide you with materials including a pandemic preparedness checklist for businesses, Frequently Asked Questions and educational posters that promote behaviors to help reduce the spread of infectious diseases. I strongly urge you to use them, because preparing for a pandemic response is not something the federal government, or the state government, or your local elected leaders can do alone. Pandemic planning must be everybody's business!



Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Antonia C. Novello M.D. M.P.H. Dr. P.H.".

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr. P.H.  
Commissioner  
New York State Department of Health



## MESSAGE TO EMPLOYERS: Pandemic Planning is Everyone's Business!

If you've seen the headlines lately, you may know that health experts are very worried about the possibility of a "pandemic" — a worldwide influenza epidemic. Because pandemics only happen when a brand new flu strain is present, almost nobody would be immune. It would take at least four months to produce a tiny amount of vaccine. Most people would not be able to get vaccinated. Health officials think that 25 percent of the world's population could become ill. Millions would be hospitalized and die. Even those whose symptoms were less severe would be too sick to work. Others would have to stay home to take care of ill family members. Despite the best efforts of government, every part of society would be affected, including the business community.

### SHOULD EMPLOYERS BE ALARMED?

*NO! But you should be concerned enough to take some sensible steps.*

### FOR INSTANCE?

- Have you thought about how you would continue to operate your business if up to half of your workforce was unavailable at the same time?
- Do you have policies—written or unwritten—that encourage ill employees to come to work? If so, will you change them? (You wouldn't want someone with pandemic flu spreading their germs to co-workers!)
- Can you make provisions for some of your employees to work from home, if necessary?
- Can you arrange for alternate supply channels if the ones you usually use are unavailable?

There are many things you can do and it's important to start **RIGHT NOW**. Find out more at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) or [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov) or call your local health department.

**Pandemic planning is everybody's business!**



# Pandemic Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

The New York State Department of Health has been working aggressively to develop a detailed plan to prepare for and respond to a possible influenza pandemic. We are moving forward to develop a comprehensive state pandemic plan, in conjunction with other state agencies, local agencies, the healthcare system and the private sector. Although planning will be an ongoing process as the pandemic threat evolves, many facets of pandemic preparedness are already in place as part of our comprehensive initiatives to protect the public health. The following information highlights the answers to the most frequently asked questions about an influenza pandemic:

## GENERAL QUESTIONS

**Q.** What is a pandemic?

**A.** An influenza pandemic is a global outbreak that results from the emergence of a new influenza virus that can cause serious illness in humans, and spreads easily from person to person.

**Q.** What's the difference between a pandemic and a seasonal outbreak of influenza?

**A.** Influenza pandemics are caused by the emergence of a virus that is “novel” (brand new) or radically different from flu viruses that circulated previously. Because people have no or little natural resistance to a new virus, and there is no readily-available vaccine, influenza pandemics often result in much more severe illness and death.

“Seasonal” influenza outbreaks are caused by small changes in the common influenza viruses. Even though these viruses may change slightly from one flu season to another, many people have developed some immunity. Because similar viruses have circulated previously, vaccine is more readily available.

**Q.** When will the next pandemic occur?

**A.** Influenza pandemics are known to have occurred several times each century since the Middle Ages. There were three influenza pandemics in the 20th century, in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Experts believe we are overdue for the next influenza pandemic.

No one can predict when a pandemic might occur, but many scientists from around the world are watching the H5N1 avian (bird) influenza situation in Asia and Europe very closely. They are preparing for the possibility that the virus in birds may change and become more easily transmissible among people.



# Pandemic Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

## H5N1 AVIAN (BIRD) INFLUENZA

**Q.** Why is there concern about the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak in Asia and other countries?

**A.** Although it is unpredictable when the next pandemic will occur, and what strain of flu virus will cause it, the continued and expanded spread of a severe form of avian influenza in birds across eastern Asia and into a few countries in Europe represents a significant threat.

This bird flu virus, known as highly pathogenic “H5N1,” has raised concerns about a potential human pandemic because:

- This H5N1 virus is widespread and persistent in poultry in many countries in Asia and has spread to birds in several countries in Europe;
- The virus has been transmitted from birds to a few species of mammals and in some limited circumstances to humans;
- Among humans known to have become infected with the avian H5N1 virus, many have developed serious illness and approximately 50 percent have died;
- Wild birds and domestic ducks have been infected without showing symptoms and have become carriers of viral infection to other domestic poultry species;
- Although most humans who were infected with the H5N1 virus had close contact with infected birds, a few cases of limited person-to-person transmission have been reported;
- Genetic studies confirm that this H5N1 influenza virus, like other influenza viruses, is continuing to change; and
- This H5N1 influenza virus may change in a way that enables it to be easily transmitted from person-to-person.

**Q.** Is the influenza A (H5N1) virus the only avian influenza virus of concern regarding a pandemic?

Although H5N1 probably poses the greatest current pandemic threat, other avian influenzas have also infected people in recent years. For example, in 1999, human H9N2 infections were identified in Hong Kong; in 2002 and 2003, human H7N7 infections occurred in the Netherlands and human H7N3 infections occurred in Canada. These viruses also have the potential to give rise to the next pandemic.

**Q.** Will H5N1 cause the next influenza pandemic?

Scientists cannot predict whether the H5N1 avian influenza virus will cause a pandemic. But federal, state and local health officials are working with their counterparts across the world to track H5N1 as it occurs in birds, and to watch for possible human cases.



# Pandemic Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

## VACCINE AND ANTIVIRAL MEDICATIONS

**Q.** Is there a pandemic influenza vaccine?

**A.** No. Federal officials have contracted with a manufacturer to produce a small supply of human vaccine against H5N1 bird flu, and clinical trials are underway. The vaccine might not be effective if the H5N1 virus changes to a strain that more easily infects humans.

**Q.** Why isn't there a vaccine available?

**A.** Large amounts of vaccine cannot be made before knowing exactly which virus is causing a pandemic. Production of a new vaccine takes approximately six months.

**Q.** Why won't the annual flu vaccine protect people against pandemic influenza?

**A.** Influenza vaccines are designed to protect against specific viruses that have already been identified, so a pandemic vaccine cannot be produced until a new influenza virus emerges and causes significant human illness. A virus that could cause a pandemic would be very different from the seasonal flu viruses for which there is already vaccine.

**Q.** Can I get the vaccine once it's developed?

**A.** Very few people would be able to get vaccinated at first. If a pandemic occurs, federal, state and local governments will work with partner groups to make specific recommendations on the early use of vaccine. Current recommendations are to target limited vaccine supplies to people at high risk and healthcare workers.

**Q.** What are influenza antiviral medications?

**A.** These are prescription drugs that can reduce influenza symptoms and shorten the length of time people are sick. The drugs may also make a person less likely to spread influenza to others. To be effective, they must be taken within two days of becoming sick. Some antiviral medications may also be used to prevent influenza if they are taken over a long period of time.

**Q.** Which antiviral medications would be used in an avian flu pandemic?

**A.** At this time, Tamiflu® and Relenza® are the most likely antiviral medications to be used in a pandemic caused by the H5N1 virus. The effectiveness of these antivirals would vary depending on the level of resistance an influenza virus may have to one or more of these medications.

**Q.** Are there enough antiviral medications for everyone if a pandemic occurred now, and if not, who will get them?

**A.** No. Although the government is stockpiling antiviral medications, there are not enough now for everyone. The federal government has made recommendations about prioritizing who will be the first to receive antiviral medications based on their risk, role in fighting the pandemic, and severity of illness. Discussion continues on the best way to allocate these medications.



# Pandemic Influenza Frequently Asked Questions

## PREPARING FOR AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

**Q.** What effect would an influenza pandemic have on our communities?

**A.** The effects of a pandemic could be severe. Many people could become sick at the same time and be unable to go to work. Many of us might have to stay at home to care for sick family members. Schools and businesses might close for a time to try to reduce the spread of disease. Large group gatherings might be canceled. These are examples of challenges that are being considered as we plan for a pandemic response.

**Q.** What can I do right now to prepare for a possible pandemic?

**A.** One of the most important things you can do is to help prevent spread of the disease. Begin now to practice simple but important habits that reduce the spread of germs:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing. Throw out the tissue in the nearest waste basket and wash your hands.
- If you don't have a tissue, don't cough or sneeze into your hand. Instead, cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm so you won't get germs on your hands and spread them to others.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. When hand washing is not possible, use antiseptic hand gels that contain alcohol.
- Stay at least three feet from people who are coughing or sneezing.
- Always practice good hand washing after contact with an ill person or soiled materials, such as tissues.
- Stay at home when you are sick.
- Keep your children home from school or daycare when they are sick.
- If you go to the doctor's office or emergency department when you are sick, ask for a mask.
- Keep a supply of non-perishable food and other essential household items on hand so you can minimize trips to stores and other crowded places in the event of a pandemic.
- Learn more about the importance of a good home preparedness plan. You can visit the American Red Cross Web site for guidance in preparing one, or visit the federal government's Pandemic Influenza Web site for planning tools.
- Stay informed.

# BUSINESS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING CHECKLIST



In the event of pandemic influenza, businesses will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. Planning for pandemic influenza is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have developed the following checklist for large businesses. It identifies important, specific activities large businesses can do now to prepare, many of which will also help you in other emergencies. Further information can be found at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) and [www.cdc.gov/business](http://www.cdc.gov/business).

## 1.1 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from labor representatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify essential employees and other critical inputs (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations by location and function during a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Train and prepare ancillary workforce (e.g. contractors, employees in other job titles/descriptions, retirees).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and plan for scenarios likely to result in an increase or decrease in demand for your products and/or services during a pandemic (e.g. effect of restriction on mass gatherings, need for hygiene supplies).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or production sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on business-related domestic and international travel (e.g. quarantines, border closures).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health, emergency management, and other sources and make sustainable links.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically. This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise periodically.

## 1.2 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures, and public transportation closures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (e.g. hand-shaking, seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations) among employees and between employees and customers (refer to CDC recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for employees.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of healthcare services during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services during a pandemic, including corporate, community, and faith-based resources, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify employees and key customers with special needs, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

### 1.3 Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic (e.g. non-punitive, liberal leave), including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at the worksite (e.g. promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette, and prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (e.g. infection control response, immediate mandatory sick leave).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for restricting travel to affected geographic areas (consider both domestic and international sites), evacuating employees working in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and guidance for employees returning from affected areas (refer to CDC travel recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company's response plan, altering business operations (e.g. shutting down operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

### 1.4 Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all business locations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for emergency response.

### 1.5 Communicate to and educate your employees:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disseminate information to employees about your pandemic preparedness and response plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers inside and outside the worksite in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g. vaccines and antivirals).

### 1.6 Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with insurers, health plans, and major local healthcare facilities to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate with local and/or state public health agencies and/or emergency responders about the assets and/or services your business could contribute to the community.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share best practices with other businesses in your communities, chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.

# DON'T SPREAD IT AROUND!

HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS THAT CAN CAUSE COLDS, FLU, AND OTHER RESPIRATORY DISEASES.

When you go to a doctor or hospital, always notify the reception area immediately if you have any flu-like symptoms (cough, fever, difficulty breathing, and/or muscle aches).

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue whenever you cough or sneeze.
- Dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Wash your hands with soap and hot water, or use a waterless hand cleanser.

If you get a respiratory infection, your doctor might suggest you wear a surgical mask to cover your mouth and nose, and keep germs from spreading.





# YOUR HEALTH IS IN YOUR HANDS

**HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS  
That Cause Colds, Flu, and Other  
Respiratory Diseases.**

**Always WASH YOUR HANDS WITH SOAP  
AND HOT WATER, Or USE A WATERLESS  
HAND CLEANSER After:**

- Blowing your nose or coughing
- Using the bathroom
- Before and after eating
- After being in contact with or being near someone who is ill